



## **Testimony of Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound**

### **Before the Appropriations Committee**

#### **Comments on H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNium ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**

**Submitted by: Leah Lopez Schmalz, Program Director**

**February 17, 2017**

*Connecticut Fund for the Environment (CFE) is a non-profit organization with over 5,500 member households statewide. The mission of CFE, and its bi-state program Save the Sound, is to protect and improve the land, air, and water of Connecticut and Long Island Sound. We use legal and scientific expertise and bring citizens together to achieve results that benefit our environment for current and future generations.*

Dear Sens. Formica and Osten, Rep. Walker and Members of the Committee:

Connecticut Fund for the Environment and its bi-state program Save the Sound (CFE/Save the Sound) writes to register its comments on HB 7027.

#### **Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**

Now, more than ever, Connecticut's residents need the state to be the defender of healthy air, clean water, and protected lands. With the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) poised to roll back federal environmental protections, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) will shoulder the burden of ensuring those roll backs do not harm our health or natural resources. Unfortunately, DEEP has repeatedly faced cuts to critical programs over the last decade. This year is no different. The proposed \$4 million dollar cut will result in increased impacts to programs and the loss of an additional 24 positions. DEEP has worked hard to do more with less, and we would ask that these new cuts not be viewed in a vacuum. Over the past decade, DEEP has eliminated numerous projects, programs and over 200 positions. These cuts not only harm the ability of the agency to protect our land, air and water, they impact the citizens' use and enjoyment of open spaces, rivers, and beaches. And ultimately these cuts hurt the state's bottom line. Many of these cost reductions manifest in the state parks, with significantly reduced seasonal staff, lagging maintenance, and even closures. This directly impacts the millions of state park visitors each year, and results in lost income for the state: for every \$1 the state spends on these parks, it gets \$38 in return.

We ask that the legislature protect the funds used to enhance residents' quality of life and keep citizens, habitats, and wildlife safe.

#### **Council on Environmental Quality**

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is a watchdog that independently reports on the status of Connecticut's environment, while paying particular attention to citizen concerns. CEQ is a lean and efficient state



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organization, making the most with two staff, an annual budget of just \$174,000, and hundreds of volunteer hours. A repeated target for elimination since 2003, CEQ demise has been prevented over several budget cycles—after recognition by legislators of its tremendous value to the state's citizens and natural resources.

CEQ's responsibilities include assessing the condition of Connecticut's environment and recommending actions to improve state environmental programs. A critical entity for the public, they are the only place a citizen with an environmental complaint can go and be sure they have a fair hearing and concrete action steps. They also provide the public with science-based information on environmental trends in the state, and monitor, assess and inform on land transfers and state projects requiring Environmental Impact Evaluations. Lastly, they provide an invaluable service to policy makers and legislators by carefully researching and recommending changes in law and regulation that will help further protect the natural resources of the state. We ask you to save CEQ once again this year.

### **CT Conservation Districts and the Council on Soil and Water**

Connecticut's Conservation Districts provide DEEP and municipalities with technical expertise needed to protect soil and water across the state. They have been able to leverage the small amount of state support more than five-fold over the years. For example, in FY14, the \$300,000 from the state was responsible for garnering a 5-year, \$10 million US Department of Agriculture grant to protect Long Island Sound and in FY16, with \$210,780 from the state, the Districts secured over \$1 million of additional funds to address conservation priorities.

Municipalities rely on the technical services and training provided by the districts, including site plan reviews, storm water management, natural resource inventories, GIS mapping, and unbiased outside expertise for local land use commissioners and staff. A little funding goes a long way, and we ask the legislature to ensure their continued operations.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of our comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Leah Schmalz, Program Director

Connecticut Fund for the Environment, and its bi-state program Save the Sound

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